

## GIUSEPPE VERDI: *IL TROVATORE*

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**SUMMARY.** *Il Trovatore* is one of Verdi's most popular operas that combine the old and the new in Verdi's aesthetic. This opera was written in the middle of a troubled period of Verdi's life – both political as well as personal – therefore one could safely say that this opera is a result of this inner turmoil, transforming Verdi's heartache in nourishment of the soul for the masses.

*Il Trovatore* is the second opera of the so-called "trilogia popolare" of *Rigoletto*, *Il Trovatore* and *La traviata*. Verdi brings a new meaning to the opera's unity by the orchestral color and the recurrence of some basic symbols (the night, the firelight, the iron of the hammers and the chains) that show an implacable, ineluctable fate. Not a capricious fate that plays with the characters, as in *La forza del destino*, but a fate that has already been destined by the actions of the others.

In the next few pages we will try to render both the historical and artistic side of the opera; its path from inspiration to actually creating a role in order to reveal some light on one of the most complex musical genres - the opera.

**Keywords:** Verdi, *Il Trovatore*, opera, analysis, trilogia, aesthetic, genesis, symbols, inovative, synopsis, musical characterization, impression.

### The Genesis of the Opera

The premiere of Verdi's *Il Trovatore* took place at Teatro Apollo<sup>1</sup>, Rome January 19, 1853. The original cast of the opera was Rosina Penco<sup>2</sup>, Giovanni Guicciardi<sup>3</sup>, Arcangelo Balderi<sup>4</sup>, Emilia Goggi<sup>5</sup> and finally Carlo Baucardé<sup>6</sup>.

The history of *Il Trovatore* takes us back to Teatro Del Principe in Madrid, where a 17-year-old young man, Guttierrez<sup>7</sup>, presents himself at the theatre in 1832 with the manuscript of a play written in verse. This play was

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<sup>1</sup> Teatro Apollo – was a theatre built in Rome in 1667 on the place of the old pontifical prison; this was the main theatre in Rome until 1888 when it was flooded and destroyed by the river Tiber.

<sup>2</sup> Penco, Rosina (1823-1894); one of the greatest sopranos of the time; role creator of Elvira from *I Puritani* by Bellini, and of Leonora from Verdi's *Il Trovatore*.

<sup>3</sup> Guicciardi, Giovanni, baritone, role creator of the Count di Luna from *Il Trovatore*.

<sup>4</sup> Balderi, Arcangelo, bass, role creator of Ferrando from *Il Trovatore*.

<sup>5</sup> Goggi, Emilia, mezzo-soprano, role creator of Azucena from *Il Trovatore*.

<sup>6</sup> Baucardé, Carlo, tenor, role creator of Manrico from *Il Trovatore*.

<sup>7</sup> Guttierrez, Antonio Garcia (1812-1884); was a Spanish Romantic dramatist.

then accepted and performed very successfully all over Europe, making Guttierrez to become a famous author. Today the play symbolizes a milestone in the Spanish literature, to such an extent that it could be compared to Hernani's place in the French literature, while its author, Guttierrez, is considered the father of the Spanish Romanticism. While performed in Milan, Cammarano<sup>8</sup> sees the musical features of this play and he rushes to deliver an opera libretto based on the play to Verdi.

Cammarano's highly dramatic libretto borrows the dynamic characters as well as the tensioned dramatic scenes from the original Spanish play. Verdi does not rush in composing the opera, for he is financially comfortable, therefore nothing could throw him off the course. Actually, almost two years would pass between the premiere of *Rigoletto* and that of *Il Trovatore*.

Verdi had the following things to say to Cammarano after receiving the first synopsis of the libretto: "*I have read your adaptation, and I am fully aware of the fact that a truly exceptional man as yourself would not be offended if I take the humble liberty of saying that we need to thoroughly keep the daring and remarkable features of the original play, or else give up entirely... I find that some situations came out lacking force as well as their original bold characteristics, and Azucena especially lost her unusual, new quality...*"<sup>9</sup> [April 9 1951]. Verdi outlined the script giving specific indications for the most important scenes of the opera. Cammarano shortly transformed the libretto to Verdi's liking. Their collaboration went on throughout the summer, despite many social and personal problems.

Verdi was troubled by the political actuality of the day – after the defeat of the revolution, the arrests and persecutions continued in Italy, while the censorship thrived. The premiere of *Rigoletto* in January 1852 in Roma had to go through many changes due to this reality. In the same year, a hard personal blow also shook the composer; his mother has passed away on June 13. Profoundly traumatized by this loss he could not continue working on the opera, so he left for Paris for a few months. After a six-month period Verdi returned to Busseto to finish *Il Trovatore*, in the meantime Cammarano had fallen ill, the composer having to learn about his death from a theatre journal days afterwards. Verdi, deeply saddened by the news, sent six hundred ducats to Cammarano's widow for the two and a half acts of *Il Trovatore*. L. E. Bardare<sup>10</sup>, a young poet, would be the one who will finish the libretto.

For the first time in Verdi's career, *Il Trovatore* was not the consequence of a request made by an Opera house. From that point on any Opera house was honored to host one of his premieres. The composer finally chose Teatro

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<sup>8</sup> Cammarano, Salvatore (1801-1852); was a prolific Italian dramatist and librettist, best known for the libretto of *Lucia di Lammermoor* by Gaetano Donizetti.

<sup>9</sup> Monaldi – G. Verdi, Milano, 1951.

<sup>10</sup> Bardare, Leone Emanuele (1820-1874); was an Italian poet, known for finishing the libretto of *Il Trovatore*, as well as writing the libretto for *Rigoletto*.

Apollo in Rome, the Opera house that was able to provide the singers he needed and wanted. His focus became the casting of Azucena, the first dramatic mezzo-soprano role in the history of opera. Verdi had only received the final version of the libretto on the last days of October.

Even though he had been thinking about *Il Trovatore* for over a year, he will finish the opera in a very short time. He arrives in December to Rome to conduct the rehearsals. The whole orchestration of the opera had been written at the theatre as he heard the singers rehearsing, thus attaining the sound he wanted for the all-round atmosphere, the sound that would best convey the true message of the drama.

### **Integrating *Il Trovatore* in Verdi's Life Work**

*Il Trovatore* is Verdi's opera that contains the most predominant musical material. It is bursting with imagination in all the domains, both from a musical and a composing point of view. *Il Trovatore* was immediately recognized as the great work of a genius that is, and following the Rome premiere, it was played in all the theatres of the civilized world.

There were those who thought that the subject of the opera was implausible and absurd, but their opinions only rose in the twentieth century, well after the premiere, when Romanticism was not "*fashionable*" anymore. Instead, Verdi was criticized to be undermining the sacrosanct characteristics of the belcanto, since he expected a vocal technique from his singers that was daring and incompatible with the art of singing, as it was known before.

Rome's opera lovers waited with great enthusiasm the premiere of the opera. This feeling would soon be shared all over Italy. By the next year, the effect grew worldwide when they presented *Il Trovatore* at the Covent Garden in London as well as at the Imperial Theatre in Saint Petersburg. *Il Trovatore* is maybe the most eloquent opera to show off Verdi's true temperament, with that mix of hostility and gentleness reflected in the characters.

With time passing, *Il Trovatore* seems to be the apotheosis of the romantic belcanto.

### **Innovative Facets of the Opera**

*Il Trovatore* is the opera that most resembles *Ernani* due to its dramatic storyline. The romantic energy, the social protest combined with a generally somber atmosphere, together with the complicated intrigues makes the two operas to be somewhat similar. However, the drama of *Il Trovatore* has also new traits, Verdi paying much more attention to the psychological facet and the turmoil of the characters. The powerful feudal world – Count di Luna and his entourage – is presented here in great contrast with the characters taken from the common people – Manrico the troubadour, a free poet who leads those oppressed, as well as Azucena, the gipsy. Verdi finds

new musical nuances to portray these characters. Azucena's and Manrico's parts are usually described by the charming simplicity of the melodies that have a hint of oriental influence.

The juxtaposition of the two entirely different worlds, of the two hostile camps can be observed during the introduction - a violent, warrior atmosphere suggested by the brass band. Ferrando's ballade tells the soldiers about the kidnapping of the Count's son by a gypsy woman. This ballade is built on extreme contrasts, sudden changes between a mysterious narrative thread and sudden explosions of superstitious horror and wrath present in the choral refrains, while the orchestra ranges from an almost whispered *pianissimo* to a shouting *fortissimo*. The basic melody of the ballad is related to the motifs present in Azucena's musical themes. In fact, this is one of the main traits chosen by Verdi to expose Azucena's complex personality. The simple melodies used to portray Azucena are mostly characterized by their tragic content, as well as by their emblematic Italian melodic motifs and even some traditional gypsy songs.

Verdi knew right from the beginning that due to her unusual and new personality Azucena would be the lead character of *Il Trovatore*. He even wanted to name the opera after her character. The composer emphasizes many times that: "... *this woman has two consuming passions: the motherly love and the love for her son.*"

If one wants to comprehend completely Azucena's character, one must take a very close look at the first scene in act II. This may be regarded as one of the most beautiful scenes of the opera – a gypsy camp in the mountains. The gypsy choir introduces the scene with a specific musical degree, a vigorous rhythm emphasized by the unusual hammer and the anvil strikes. The flames of the campfire awoken a dreadful memory in Azucena – the death of her mother who was burnt on a stake, as well as the promise she made her mother to avenge her death.

The emotional richness of Azucena's simple melodies renders a captivating force to the scene. Verdi, by giving new emotional meaning to the old musical forms, created an artistic imagery that seduced and fascinated the Italian audience with a dramatic feeling that has never been seen before in the Italian opera.

The composer felt it was crucial to emphasize the most unusual psyche of Azucena. While writing the opera's script, Verdi spent a lot of time analyzing and constructing the psychological facet of the gypsy woman. Regarding the interrogation scene from the Count's camp in the third act, Verdi wrote: "*The dialogues, the questions and the answers raised in the Spanish drama thoroughly emphasize the personality of the gypsy woman... <<Where are you going? – I do not know. I lived in the mountains and I had a son. He left me. Let me go find him. >> ... "Do not turn Azucena into a mad*

woman, said Verdi to Cammarano when asked about the final prison scene. *Exhausted from fatigue, suffering, fear and sleepless nights she is confused. Her mental faculties are weakened, but she is not insane.*"<sup>11</sup> [April 9 1851].

Verdi also knew how to suggestively portray Manrico's personality; his melodies are characterized by simplicity and they conquer us by their oriental influence. Manrico's serenade can be described this way, a musical material that has furthermore a deep improvisational feeling to it – showing the true nature of a troubadour – accompanied by the lute at night, under Leonora's balcony (act 1).

As the narrative thread unfolds, Manrico changes from a lyrical poet, a dreamer, into a heroic figure, nonetheless his musical portrayal does not lose its song-like simplicity.

### **The Synopsis of *Il Trovatore***

*Place: Biscay and Aragon (Spain)*

*Time: Fifteenth century.*

#### **Act I: The Duel**

*Scene 1: The guard room in the castle of Luna (The Palace of Aljaferia, Zaragoza, Spain)*

Ferrando, the captain of the guards, orders his men to keep watch while Count di Luna wanders restlessly beneath the windows of Leonora, lady-in-waiting to the Princess. Di Luna loves Leonora, and he is jealous of his successful rival, the troubadour Manrico. In order to keep the guards awake, Ferrando narrates the history of the count to the guard. (Aria: "*Di due figli vivea padre beato*") It appears that a gypsy woman had once bewitched the little brother of the count, making the child weak and ill, and for this she had been burnt alive as a witch. Dying, she had commanded her daughter Azucena to avenge her, which she did by carrying off the younger brother. Although the burnt bones of a child were found in the ashes of the pyre, the father refused to believe in his son's death; dying, he commanded Count di Luna to seek the gypsy's daughter.

*Scene 2: Garden in the palace of the princess*

Leonora confesses her love for Manrico to her confidante, Ines. ("*Tacea la notte placida*"... "*Di tale amor*"). When they have gone, Count di Luna hears the voice of his rival (Manrico, behind the scenes: "*Deserto sulla terra*"). While Leonora in the darkness mistakes the count for her lover, Manrico himself enters the garden, and she rushes to his arms. The count recognises Manrico as his enemy, who has been condemned to death, and he compels him to fight. Leonora tries to intervene, but she cannot stop them from fighting (Trio: "*Di geloso amor sprezzato*").

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<sup>11</sup> Monaldi: G. Verdi, Milano, 1951.

**Act 2: The Gypsy Woman**

*Scene 1: The gypsies' camp*

While Manrico sits at the bedside of his mother, Azucena, the gypsies sing the famous *Anvil Chorus* (Chorus: "*Vedi le fosche notturne*"). She is the daughter of the Gypsy burnt by the count and, although old, still nurses her vengeance. (Aria: "*Stride la vampa*") The Gypsies break camp while Azucena confesses to Manrico that after stealing him she had intended to burn the count's little son, but had thrown her own child into the flames instead (Aria: "*Condotta ell'era in ceppi*"). Manrico realizes that he is not the son of Azucena, but loves her as if she were indeed his mother, as she has always been faithful and loving to him. Manrico tells Azucena that he defeated Di Luna in their duel, but he was held back from killing him by a mysterious power (Duet: "*Mal reggendo*") A messenger arrives and reports that Leonora, who believes Manrico dead, is about to enter a convent and take the veil that night. Manrico rushes away to prevent her from carrying out this purpose.

*Scene 2: In front of the convent*

Di Luna and his attendants intend to abduct Leonora and the Count sings his love for her (Aria: "*Il balen del suo sorriso*" ... "*Per me ora fatale*"). Leonora and the nuns appear in procession, but Manrico prevents Di Luna from carrying out his plans and instead, takes Leonora away with him.

**Act 3: The Son of the Gypsy Woman**

*Scene 1: Di Luna's camp*

(Chorus: "*Or co' dadi ma fra poco*") Ferrando brings in the captured Azucena. She is recognised by Di Luna and sentenced to be burnt.

*Scene 2: A chamber in the castle*

Leonora and Manrico live only for each other. (Aria, Manrico: "*Ah si, ben mio coll'essere*") Ruiz, Manrico's comrade, reports that Azucena is to be burned at the stake. Manrico rushes to her help (Stretta: "*Di quella pira l'orrendo foco*"). Leonora faints.

**Act 4: The Punishment**

*Scene 1: Before the dungeon keep*

Leonora attempts to free Manrico, who has been captured by Di Luna (Aria: "*D'amor sull'ali rosee*", Chorus & Duet: "*Miserere*"). Leonora begs Di Luna for mercy and she offers herself in place of her lover. She promises to give herself to the count, but secretly intends to die first by taking poison (Duet: "*Mira, d'acerbe lagrime*").

*Scene 2: In the dungeon*

Manrico and Azucena are awaiting their execution. Manrico attempts to soothe Azucena, whose mind wanders (Duet: "*Ai nostri monti ritorneremo*") At last the gypsy slumbers. Leonora comes to Manrico and tells him that he

is saved, begging him to escape. When he discovers that she cannot accompany him, he refuses to leave his prison. He believes Leonora has betrayed him until he realizes that she has taken poison to remain true to him. As she dies in agony in Manrico's arms she confesses (Aria: "*Tu vedrai che amore in terra*") that she prefers to die with him than to marry another. (Quartet: "*Prima che d'altri vivere*") The count enters to find Leonora dead in his rival's arms and orders Manrico to be led to execution. Azucena arises from her couch and when Di Luna, dragging her to a window, shows her the dying Manrico, she cries in triumph "*He was your brother. You are avenged, oh mother!*" The opera ends with the count screaming in despair, at the same time as Azucena, "*E vivo ancor!*" ("*And yet I am still alive!*")

### Leonora's Musical Characterization

One can safely say that the characters of *Il Trovatore* are static by nature; they do not change throughout the opera. The only exception from this rule will be Leonora herself. She is the one who evolves as a character both from a musical and a dramatic point of view.

Her first aria (act I, scene 2) follows the traditional form, with its slow – rapid parts and recitatives, while its cabaletta is richly ornamented and filled with coloratura passages. One of the most memorable orchestral parts written by Verdi is the few measures introducing the *andantino* – the mystery conveyed by the string ensemble in *ab* minor and the clarinet solo that emerges out of this mystery. The second motif uses one of the most effective ways to emphasize the tragic of the composer's heroine, namely the scale like ascending melody that ends in a descendent *dome*.

Ex. 1

*animando un poco*  
*con espressione*  
 do - ci s'u - di - ro e de - bi - ti

The musical material of Leonora is built in a quite interesting way. One can observe distinctive antithesis between the lyrical or ensemble parts and the agitated, a tense atmosphere; the latter being characterized by musical ornaments, some rhythmical formulas interrupted by numerous short pauses.

An example could be the cabaletta of the aria in the first act:

Ex. 2

Di te - le amor, che dir - si

Or the melody that ends scene 4 of the second act:

Ex. 3

*con tutta forza di sentimento*

È deg - gio e pos - sa  
cru - derlo? Ti veg - gu a me d'accai - to!

In addition, we can find this trait in the Miserere,

Ex. 4

Conten - de l'amba - scia, che tut - ta min -  
res - te, al labbro il res pi - vo, i pal - pi - ti al

As well as in the last strophe of the Leonora – Count di Luna duet:

Ex. 5

*molto vivace*

Vi - vra! Con - ten - de il giu - bi - lo

The scales used to set the atmosphere of a scene also play a vital part in depicting the characters. We notice the use of many scales close to *Ab* major: *ab* minor, *c* minor, *f* minor, *F* major and *Eb* major. This musical point can be observed also at the other characters, Verdi using this to methodically assemble his characters.

Leonora's character, as well as her musical material, is undoubtedly evolving throughout the opera. Her musical depiction is also developing from the state of the young woman in love to the heroin who sacrifices herself out of love for her beloved.



The musical material of the soprano requires a dramatic voice, though it also needs agility for the coloratura parts, as well as a lyrical voice that is familiar with the belcanto technique and with very high notes (acts IV).

### **Personal Impressions**

My story with *Il Trovatore* had started by accident. I was in the fourth year at the Conservatory when I chose – for my opera class – a few important fragments of Azucena from *Il Trovatore*. I chose this role because I was considered a mezzo-soprano in the Conservatory, and I only started to approach soprano roles when I later became a singer of the Hungarian Opera in Cluj. My next encounter with this operatic masterpiece was in 1975, when I had my debut at the Hungarian Opera in Cluj, with *Il Trovatore*, but this time as Ines, a *soprano spinto* role.

To complete the circle of the feminine characters, I debuted on June 2 1992 in Leonora on the same stage. I have also sung this role in the Summer Theatre on Margit Island (Budapest, Hungary). The three performances I was about to sing on the open-air stage here were thoroughly prepared. The sheer dimensions on the open-air stage were incomparable to the size of a normal opera stage. With almost one hundred extras, one can imagine the massive choir and also the numerous ballet dancers performing the final scenes. Of course, due to the circumstances of these performances everything changes – from the voice that is perceived differently by the two thousands people in the audience, to the gesticulations and mimicking that had to convey the same dramatic message to an audience that was farther away. The other times insignificant entries and exits on and off the stage had had become endless waiting periods “backstage” to be able to reenter for the next scene. Another important aspect was the musical coordination with the orchestra. Due to the great distance between the stage and the orchestra, the sound installations had to be perfect in order for the singers to hear their musical queue in time, and that the performance to be synchronized.

The role of Leonora was created gradually during the two-week rehearsal time. In the end, we managed to convey the most loyal version of Verdi's *Il Trovatore* in director Kürthy András<sup>12</sup> interpretation, and with the collaboration of the conductor Medveczky Ádám<sup>13</sup>, and the help of the other singers and performers. I very much appreciated the freedom I was given in building my character, thus being able to lend a few personal notes to the character. My colleagues – some of whom were internationally renowned artists – forced me to be much harder on myself, and to rise to my own expectations.

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<sup>12</sup> Kürthy, András, world renowned opera director, was on the staff of La Scala of Milan, was one of Pavarotti's impresarios and organized many of the Three tenors concerts all over the world.

<sup>13</sup> Medveczky Ádám (1941-); conductor, world renowned artist, was awarded the *Liszt Ferenc Award* and many other international awards. Since 1974, he teaches at the *Liszt Ferenc Music Academy* in Budapest and conducts orchestras all over the world.

Leonora's character is a determined character, who knows what she wants, and who in the end is capable to make the ultimate sacrifice to save her loved-one from dying. The pages of the opera propose a rich new emotional and musical universe to this character. From a vocal standpoint, the soprano has to express a large range of varied nuances and colors, from the most lyrical to the deeply dramatic. Because of the many complex obstacles this role could raise, it is preferred to be approached by an established singer.

I have had the chance to perform the role of Leonora in other cities of Romania also, such as Timișoara, Galați and Constanța.

The role of Leonora has given me immense professional satisfactions, and it has remained one of the roles that is closest to my heart.

(Translated by: Köpeczi Juliánna Erika)

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